

Blues and Theology, 6HT509
Summer 2009, Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington DC

Instructor: Stephen J. Nichols
E-mail: snichols@lbc.edu
Home: 717-445-4102

RTS Washington DC, McLean
June 2-3, 2009

I. Course Description

This course explores the theology of early blues music and culture, acknowledging the roots of blues in African American Christianity and the spirituals. The theological themes of alienation, suffering, and sin receive attention, as well as the themes of salvation and hope. The course also looks at the route the blues took in American and British music as a way to discuss the intersection of Christianity and popular culture.

II. Texts

Required Texts:

Allen Dwight Callahan, *The Talking Book: African Americans and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

Stephen J. Nichols, *Getting the Blues: What Blues Music Teaches us about Suffering and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008).

Note: Bring the books with you to class.

III. Evaluation

Paper: Write a seven-page paper. Worth 80%.

There are a few options here. You could relate blues music to a particular passage in an exegetical paper. Or you could relate blues music to a particular aspect of theology. Or you could also relate blues music to pastoral ministry or to pastoral counseling. More details to come in class. Please approve your topic with me.

Due: To be announced in class.

Write a blues song: Worth 20%.

This is for the creative writer in you. An example of the type of thing I'm looking for may be found on page 89 of *Getting the Blues*. More details to come in class.

Due: To be announced in class.

IV. Course Schedule

Day One:

- Lectures and Discussions:
- introduction to the course
 - blues roots: African American experience and the blues

Reading:

- Callahan, *The Talking Book*. This book provides an overview of the interplay between African American experiences and African American hermeneutics. It has both historical and topical themes running through it. This book provides a larger context into which the blues, as well as the legacy of the blues, can be placed. Read as much of it as you are able.

Day Two:

Lectures and Discussions:

- theological themes in the blues
- the legacy of the blues
- the blues and pastoral ministry

Reading:

- Nichols, *Getting the Blues*. The first chapter offers the big picture of the blues and the world of the Mississippi Delta. The next chapters explore the theology of the blues. Why wouldn't you read every word of this book?